



THE FLYLEAF

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THE REGIONAL INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION EXCHANGE:

A New Service for Business, Commerce, and Industry

Late in June, 1967, Rice University received official notice that its proposal to establish a service to be known as the Regional Information and Communication Exchange (R.I.C.E.) has been awarded "special merit" designation by the U.S. Department of Commerce and partial funding under the State Technical Services Act of 1965. With the support and interest of business, commerce, and industry of the western Gulf Coast area it should now be possible to turn this proposal into an operation that will pool and share the business and technical information in several participating academic institutions for the benefit of business and industry.

When Public Law 89-182, the State Technical Services Act, was approved by Congress and signed by President Johnson on September 14, 1965, academic institutions throughout the nation which had a history of assisting business and industry with technical information began to study its enacted purposes and provisions. Briefly, Congress had found that "wider diffusion and more effective application of science and technology in business, commerce, and industry are essential to the growth of the economy, to higher levels of employment, and to the competitive position of United States products in world markets, . . . that the benefits of federally financed research, as well as other research, must be placed more effectively in the hands of American business, commerce, and industrial establishments...." Congress, therefore, provided a program of incentives and support by means of which states, by themselves and in cooperation with one another, would be encouraged to establish and maintain state and interstate technical service programs

to help realize the aims of the Act. In signing the Act into law President Johnson said, in part, "it. . . will do for American businessmen what the great Agricultural Extension Service has done for the American farmer. It will put into their hands the latest ideas and methods, the fruits of research and development."

In one of the lectures sponsored by the Fondren Library on February 19, 1963, as a contribution to Rice's Semi-Centennial celebration, it was recalled that the Fondren had been of service to business and industry throughout the fifty-year period of Rice's history, but especially since World War II when there occurred an unprecedented expansion in all the basic industries within this region. The Fondren, for example, could share with industry its large and complete files of scientific and technical serials, the great national bibliographies, and the specialized indexes and bibliographic aids and reference works. In this lecture it was noted that a new period was beginning. "Henceforth, the role of the university libraries must

be new, characterized less by the ability to have all and be all than by fuller cooperation with larger community efforts to organize and coordinate existing resources into a program that will help the universities as well as industry."

In taking a fresh look at the Fondren's role in helping to develop such a program and in considering the part the State Technical Services Act might play, this view was kept in mind. Also borne in mind was the trend toward rapid communication and ready cooperation among university and research libraries and the rapid development, on a national scale, of library computer technology, to which the Fondren was already making a contribution. These advances are rapidly changing library procedures in storing and transferring information. The Fondren wishes to relate to and cooperate with the announced policy of the Texas agency of the State Technical Services Act that calls for the development of four or five major library network systems to link the state with technical service programs.

The result of these considerations is the Fondren's proposal that has won recognition and support at the national level. This plan provides that the libraries of as many as eighteen academic institutions along the Gulf Coast — from Lake Charles, Louisiana, through Beaumont and Houston, Corpus Christi, Kingsville, and Edinburg, and on to Monterrey, Mexico — be linked together by teletype into a regional information exchange. The Fondren Library will be the headquarters for the Exchange. The purpose of the Exchange and the communications linkage is to make available to business, commerce, and industry the information resources of the region and to provide convenient locations through which businesses without teletype may gain access to the services of the Exchange from distant points in the region.

The use of teletype for information transfer is the first feature of this new approach to library service, but there will be reliance on modern technology as well as on skilled staff in all Exchange services.

The Fondren already has a background of several years' experience in using computer techniques for certain library processes. For Exchange purposes the Fondren has acquired and is already operating the first library-housed computer for library services in the state of Texas. This computer will provide the means of searching and storing bibliographic data developed in the area, and obtained elsewhere, and of performing literature searches from machine-readable magnetic tapes. The whole operation is designed to benefit subscribing members in ways not possible until this time.

No one library in the nation or in a region can possibly house and service all information of potential interest to its readers and users. This is particularly true in the southwest section of the country where there are relatively few library collections of the scope of the large holdings of the great research libraries in other parts of the nation. Much is expected, therefore, from the Information Exchange in determining

the real strengths and weaknesses of the library resources of this region. It may, perhaps, lead to the development of a regional acquisitions program that will put dollars to better use as the number of publications grows and the cost of books and periodicals rises.

It is hoped that Gulf Coast business, commerce, and industry will recognize the value of the Exchange in organizing and disseminating the technical information of the entire nation, as well as of the area, for their benefit. Hundreds of businesses in this area do not or cannot support their own technical libraries. For these the Information Exchange should be a boon. Scores of businesses do support their own libraries. It is definitely not intended or expected that the Exchange should cause any of these units to be phased out. On the contrary, to make the best and most intelligent use of the Exchange, many companies currently without libraries and technical librarians may well conclude that they require them. It is un-

likely that any but the most nominal of library operations in industry would go out of business because of the Exchange. Technical librarians everywhere in the region, with whom the Fondren has long cooperated, will find their own work speeded and aided and made more meaningful by the Exchange.

Plans are now being made to present the Information Exchange to Gulf Coast business men and industrialists. An experienced staff of trained librarians and computer specialists now being assembled at the Fondren to operate the Exchange will cooperate in this effort with an Advisory Council of able business and civic leaders headed by Messrs. Gail Whitcomb and Carl E. Reistle, Jr., of Houston. Participating colleges and universities and interested chambers of commerce will also assist. It must be made clear that to assure the success of the Exchange business must help in its development. Rice can only qualify for the federal grant if and when it matches the grant with industrial and other monies. Such funds must come

largely in the form of memberships in the Exchange, the participating members recognizing that the services can make a proper return on each membership fee. In fact, these federal funds must be more than matched in this first year in order to demonstrate the kind of Exchange services that will win further support from the Department of Commerce in 1968 and to assure Commerce that the Exchange is likely to become strong and self-supporting in the near future.

Friends of the Fondren Library can make a constructive contribution if, corporately and individually, they will seek to understand and promote this latest endeavor of their library. The Fondren calls on the Friends to help make the Regional Information and Communication Exchange worthy of the "special merit" designation it has just been awarded.

Richard L. O'Keeffe
Associate Librarian
Fondren Library

In the October issue of the FLYLEAF there will be a second article describing the services which the Information Exchange expects to offer to science education and library development within the Gulf Coast region.

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